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A TIME TO BREAK DOWN DOORS – A TIME TO Wait

by *Dr. Elliot Prager*

The story is told of the Skierniewice Rebbe who was asked by one of the town's wealthy Gevirim to speak with his daughter who had run away to a local convent with the intent of converting to Catholicism. The Rebbe immediately set out for the convent but was denied entry. He then wrote and had delivered a letter to the young woman, informing her that he would wait for two days on the corner opposite the convent, seeking only to speak with her. If by midnight of the second day she did not appear, he would understand that she had no interest in meeting with him and he would return home. And so, midnight of the second day came and went and the woman did not appear. The Rebbe decided that he would remain on the corner a third day and night. Shortly after midnight on the third day the Gevir's daughter emerged from the convent, crossed the street and spoke at length with the Skierniewice Rebbe. She returned to the convent that night, but not for long. Several months later, the Gevir paid a personal visit to the Rebbe to inform him that his daughter was engaged to one of the finest young Torah scholars in town.

At the wedding celebration, the Rebbe went over to the Kallah and asked her a question that had preoccupied his mind since their fateful meeting on the street corner: "If you remember, I had written a note to you that I would wait for two days and nights across from the convent and that I would abandon the street corner if you didn't show up by midnight of the second night. What made you think that I would still be waiting for you a third night?" Without hesitation, the Kallah replied: "Knowing you as I do, Rebbe, I knew that you would never give up waiting for me."

As a number of Midrashim emphasize, Hashem intentionally chooses to destroy the world with the flood, since it takes time for the rain to develop into a catastrophic deluge and perhaps, in the time that it takes for nature to fulfill Hashem's plan, mankind would see that this was no empty threat and they would be motivated to do Teshuvah. Yet, Noach has no interest in the lives of those beyond his immediate family. Just as the Dor HaHaflagah is driven only by their concern for the needs of the larger society, so Noach has no faith or hope that those around him are capable of changing their ways and thus he can focus only on the individual – himself and his family.

In the age of nanoseconds, we have lost the ability to wait. Whether it's waiting 15 seconds to get onto the internet or

tolerating delayed gratification of something we desire, we live in a world in which we've come to expect immediate responses, immediate solutions to problems, instant gratification, quick remedies and quick fixes. Our patience for "answers" is measured not in days, months or years, but in the length of a sound bite.

Judaism dictates moments and circumstances when we must act, and act quickly: we cannot stand by in the face of evil and injustice; we cannot stand by and wait helpless when there is a world that requires Tikkun; we cannot wait when we have it in our power to take history into our hands and move the process of redemption one step closer. The waters of Yam Suf, the Midrash tells us, did not part until Nachshon ben Aminadav jumped in. And, while Noach waits patiently (or fearfully) for Hashem to instruct him to leave the ark, the Midrash Tanchuma quotes Rabi Yehudah bar Ilai's daring statement: "If I had been there I would have broken down the door and taken myself out." How prescient that statement is in light of the 19th century Zionist movement's bid to reclaim control over Jewish destiny and their impatience with waiting in Galut.

But our tradition also teaches us to wait and never to abandon hope: "Ki Mechakim Anachnu Lach" "We are waiting for You," Ashkenazic Jews recite in the Shabbat and Yom Tov Shacharit Kedushah. And have we not continued to say throughout the generations and long nights of Jewish history, "..... VeAf Al Pi SheYitma'meiha, Im Kol Zeh Achakeh Lo?" Is not our God a "Keil Erech Apayim," "a God slow to anger" who wants only for us to return to Him?

In our world of instant everything, we make snap judgments of others, we are impatient for change in others and despair of immediate transformations, often in those we love and care about most. We give up all too quickly on our children, on our spouses, on our friends, on our leaders. The art of Teshuvah is not only the ability, willingness, readiness to admit to others our shortcomings; it is not only having the inner strength to ask others for forgiveness. It is about the ability to refuse to abandon the street corner and the ability to hold fast to the hope and faith that those who have in one way or another disappointed us or who fall short of our ideals and expectations will eventually reunite with us on that corner.

DEATH – A NEW PHENOMENON

by *Binyamin Novetsky (17)*

Parashat Noach begins with a problem. God sees that man is sinful and wicked and realizes that mankind's creation was a mistake. He therefore concludes that mankind must be destroyed (BeReishit 6:12). While theologically there is much to discuss about this, especially concerning the fact that God makes a decision and then retracts it, that is not our concern in this essay. What I seek to address is simpler – what specifically prompted Hashem's stern reaction? It has not been that long since the creation of the world, both in time and in events important enough to be recorded in the

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Torah. Less than a millennium after Genesis, God is already fed up with the world. What went wrong so (relatively) quickly?

The answer, I believe, is implicit in the part of the Torah directly before the beginning of Parashat Noach. In the chapter directly preceding our Parashah, we see the first time for an event, something so significant that it overthrows the entirety of the natural order and descends the world into utter madness, to the point that God cannot imagine allowing existence as we know it to continue.

Towards the end of Parashat BeReishit (5:4), we hear that Adam dies. Now, death itself is no surprise to the people of Earth – after all, Hevel was killed centuries ago, in all likelihood (4:8). The issue here is that nobody killed Adam. Death by murder is simple to understand: you have a body, and it was broken beyond repair. Death by nature, though, is both terrifying and incomprehensible. Nothing went wrong that you can see, because all the problems with age affect our insides, not our outsides. Sure, we see wrinkles, but how are people who have never seen a natural death before to know what those signify? In their eyes, a person died, not because he was hurt, not because he was sick, but just because he did. Can anyone imagine a more horrific sight?

And so, is it any wonder that the world collapses? Society itself can no longer stand as it once did, not when you know that life is truly finite, not when you have seen a man return to the dust from whence he came – “Ki Afar Atah VeEl Afar Tashuv,” “For you are dust, and unto dust you shall return” (3:19) – without any external force pushing him to do so. What is powerful about the entirety of Perek 5, though, is that it hits us over the head with these natural deaths. One after another after another these people die, their only recorded accomplishment being the birth of sons and daughters, and the only son who we hear the name of *also dies*. To those who are inexperienced with death, this cannot seem like anything less than the cataclysm itself.

God’s decision to destroy the world is still troubling, but now understandable. This is not some moral failure or repeated sin that He simply is too lazy to fix. It is a breakdown of everything that is because suddenly there is nothing to be relied upon. Trust is fundamentally destroyed knowing that you are relying upon a person who just might stop being around one day for no apparent reason. There is no way to repair this.

Theological problems aside, we see that this is a problem God eventually resolves. While Noach still lives to the ripe old age of 950 (9:29), his sons make it to only 500. By the third generation, they begin to have children in their 30’s, not their 100’s. Less than 10 generations later, Noach’s descendants don’t even live to 200 years old. God changes the human lifespan dramatically, and with it goes the disaster that made Him decide to destroy the world, but the price has been paid. We may get our fair time on a dry world, but we’re getting more than 800 years less than what we did before.

HALACHAH FOR THE BATTLEFIELD

by Eitan Leff ('18)

After the water from the Mabul subsided, Hashem commanded Noach to be fruitful and multiply and blessed Noach that all animals on the earth will fear human beings (BeReishit 9:2). Then Noach is warned that he should not eat from an animal that is still alive (9:4). After that, the Torah says, “VeAch Et Dimechem LeNafshoteichem Edrosh,” “But your blood, of your souls, I will demand” (9:5). Rashi (ad loc. s.v. VeAch Et Dimechem) explains that even though man is able to take the life of an animal, man is not permitted to take his own life. Rashi’s next commentary (ad loc. s.v. LeNafshoteichem) adds that while you might have thought one would be able to kill oneself with strangulation, for no blood is spilled, that too is forbidden.

In 2008, the Israel Defense Forces conducted Operation Cast Lead to stop rocket fire from Gaza into Israel. Some IDF soldiers were warned by their commanders to avoid capture, and if necessary, choose suicide over capture. There are a few reasons the commanders said to choose suicide over capture:

1. Avoid torture.
2. The soldier would be used in a trade for prisoners.
3. A rescue mission could result in more deaths than it would save.
4. It could affect the troops’ morale to know that their friend is being tortured.

Under Jewish law, would it be permissible to commit suicide to prevent being captured alive? Commenting on the Gemara (Bava Kama 91b), Rashi writes that Hashem will punish a person who kills himself. Rambam (Hilchot Rotzei’ach UShemirat HaNefesh 2:2-3), based on Rashi’s commentary, states that a person who kills himself is equated to a murderer and thus is liable for the punishment of death at the hands of God. Rambam derives this Halachah from our aforementioned Pasuk from Parashat Noach. Another proof of the prohibition of suicide is found in Pesikta Rabbati (Shemot 24), which states that when the Torah writes “Lo Tirtzach,” “Do not murder,” it is talking about killing oneself. Rambam rules in Hilchot Sanhedrin (18:6) that Beit Din should not punish someone on the basis of his own confession; rather, Beit Din must have two witnesses to find someone guilty and punish him. Ridvaz argues that the reason for this is that a person’s life is not his own, but rather is Hashem’s. Just as a person is forbidden to kill oneself, one is also forbidden to confess to something that will get oneself killed.

The question now arises about Sha’ul’s suicide (recorded in Sefer Shemuel) – if up to now we have said that it is forbidden to commit suicide, how could Sha’ul have fallen on his sword to kill himself? Sha’ul’s reasoning for wanting to die was that the Philistim were waging war against the Jews, and he did not want to be killed by the enemy and be made into a mockery.

The Midrash (BeReishit Rabbah 34:13) states that the reason our Pasuk in Parashat Noach says “VeAch Et DiMechem,” “But your blood,” is to exclude some cases, such as Sha’ul’s. The word “but” implies a limitation to the rule; therefore, Sha’ul’s suicide was permitted.

Why was Sha’ul’s suicide permitted? The Beit Yosef (Yoreh Dei’ah 157, Bedek HaBayit), quoting the Orchot Chaim, explains that one can commit suicide to avoid torture. The Rosh makes a similar assertion but adds that it is forbidden to eulogize someone

who committed suicide. However, in Shaul's case, the Jews should have eulogized him, because his suicide was permitted and the Jews were even punished for not eulogizing him. The Orchof Chaim then presents an alternate approach – perhaps, Shaul's suicide actually was not permitted. The Yam Shel Shlomo (Bava Kama 8:59) says that Shaul knew that the Phelishtim would torture and kill him and realized his fellow soldiers would possibly risk their lives to save him, which would result in many deaths. Therefore, Shaul chose his death over many deaths. The Shayari Knesset HaGedolah, commenting on the Beit Yosef (Yoreh Deah 157), explains that Shmuel HaNavi had already informed Shaul HaMelech when he would die, and therefore Shaul was certain his death would occur in the battle with the Pelishtim at Gilboa. However, he says that if a person is not informed of his impending doom by a Navi, he is not allowed to kill himself, because there is a chance he will be saved.

Rav Zilberstein, in his popular work *Veha'arev Na*, says that he is not sure how to rule regarding this matter. However, if a soldier committed suicide, even if the suicide was not endorsed by Rabbinic authority, Rav Zilberstein asserts that he would not lose his share in Olam HaBa and should be buried and mourned like a soldier who died in action. May Hashem ensure that we never face such tragic situations as these.

NOTICING THE 53RD CARD

by Rabbi Chaim Jachter

The Seneh vs. Ma'amad Har Sinai

Ma'amad Har Sinai, the Sinaitic Revelation, was undoubtedly a grand event. Shemot 19:16 captures the power of that great moment in Jewish history: "And it came to pass on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of a horn exceedingly loud; and all the people that were in the camp trembled." By contrast, the revelation at the Seneh, the burning bush, of Shemot Perek 3 is surprisingly modest. Hashem's introduction to Moshe Rabbeinu is most certainly a great moment. It is very surprising that it was conducted in such a low-key manner.

Three Classic Solutions

The classic Meforashim explain that Hashem was communicating visual messages to Moshe Rabbeinu through this revelation. Rashi (Shemot 3:2 s.v. Mitoch HaSeneh) explains that Hashem chose a modest presentation as a means of showing that He empathizes with the plight and suffering of the Jews in Mitzrayim. An analogy can be drawn to families making a wedding during in 1944. While a wedding is undoubtedly a most joyous occasion, the suffering of European Jewry would incline families to make a much more modest affair than in normal times.

Chizkuni (Shemot 3:2 s.v. VeHaSeneh Einenu Ukal) explains that the fire represents the Egyptians and the burning bush symbolizes the Jewish People. The message communicated is that just as the fire does not consume the bush, so too the Egyptians will not succeed in their efforts to destroy the Jewish People.

A third approach, emerging from Rashi to Shemot 3:12 (s.v. Lecha HaOt), is that the burning bush represents Moshe Rabbeinu. Hashem communicates to Moshe Rabbeinu that just as the burning bush is not consumed since it is performing God's will, so too

Moshe will survive his encounters with Par'oh since he will be performing God's appointed task (Shelichut).

Rav David Fohrman's Approach – Noticing the 53rd Card

Rav David Fohrman develops a most interesting approach

(<https://www.alephbeta.org/course/lecture/seeing-the-hidden-miracle/autoplay>):

The fact that the bush was burning and not being consumed was a difficult miracle to notice. What exactly is it about that sight which makes it difficult to notice? Well, the first one is the element of time. How long do you have to look at a burning bush before you notice that the bush isn't being consumed? Pretty long time. But even if you look at it for a long time, you still might not notice it. And there lies the key. Why wouldn't you notice it?

The answer is: because that's not the way bushes work. Bushes always get consumed eventually when they burn. And because it's not the way bushes work, even if your eyes see the bush remaining intact despite the fire, your mind might not necessarily expect what your eyes say. Let me explain what I mean by that.

A while ago, a social psychology experiment was conducted. It involved college students, who were asked to look at playing cards and identify which cards they were seeing. So, they were shown a whole bunch of playing cards - an eight of spades, a three of hearts, five of clubs; except, they were shown these kids a three of hearts and one of the hearts have been erased with whiteout. So, we want to see how the kids would identify this card.

So, they did this experiment with hundreds of kids, and every student got to look at the cards for 5/6/7 seconds. And the experiment was what would happen once they got to the anomalous cards. When they got to the three of hearts with only two hearts, how did the kids identify it? Turns out, about half of them identified that there's a three of hearts. About half of them identified it as a two of hearts. But no one said, "There's no such card like that on the deck, there's something wrong with that card." They got to look at this card for 5/6/7 seconds and no one saw what it really was. Their eyes could see what was there, but their brains couldn't accept what their eyes were seeing.

Each one of those students came to that experiment with a certain preconceived notion in their minds. The deck contains only 52 cards, and what they saw was a 53rd card; card that's not in the standard deck. But their brain didn't accept the possibility of a 53rd card.

So, what happens when your eyes see something that doesn't fit your preconceived

notions. You take the round peg and we smash it into the square hole. By golly! It's either going to be the three of hearts or it's going to be a two of hearts, but I'm going to make this fit; and you don't even realize you saw something anomalous.

When you see things that burn, the thing that's burning always gets consumed. That's why this miracle was so hard to notice. Even if you had the luxury of time, even if you could look at it long enough, you wouldn't always see. That was the final test. Moses had to be someone who could see not with his eyes, but accept with his mind what his eyes saw.

Moshe Rabbeinu passed the test with flying colors: Shemot 3:4 records, "Hashem saw that Moshe went to investigate [the burning bush that was not being consumed] and Hashem called out to Moshe Rabbeinu." Moshe did notice the proverbial 53rd card, proving his worthiness to be the recipient of divine communication and the leader of the Jewish People. Moshe Rabbeinu would be entrusted to teaching us how to notice and appreciate Hashem's miracles. Moshe Rabbeinu noticing the subtle miracle of the Seneh proved that he could be the one to teach us to notice and appreciate the subtle involvement of Hashem in our world. Many, if not most, people would not take notice of the miracle of the bush that is not consumed. Moshe Rabbeinu was not like most people, and he set an example for generations to come.

The Bush that is not Consumed – Why Does the Persecuted People Survive and Thrive?

Every intelligent person should be asking a question similar to the one posed by Moshe Rabbeinu, "Why is the bush not being consumed?" regarding the miraculous survival of the Jewish People.

One such intelligent observer is Rav Warren Goldstein, the eloquent chief rabbi of South Africa, who writes (<http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Op-Ed-Contributors/Days-of-miracle-and-wonder>):

These are indeed days of "miracle and wonder." Some 250 years ago Rav Yaakov Emden wrote that the miracles performed by G-d to ensure the survival of the Jewish people throughout the many years of exile are even greater than the awe-inspiring miracles of the Exodus from Egypt – the ten plagues, the splitting of the sea, the manna falling from heaven and the Clouds of Glory. Jewish destiny defies the normal laws of history.

By any logical and rational assessment, we should not exist as a separate, identifiable people after almost 2,000 years of exile, dispersion and persecution. But G-d's plan

for us rises above the limitations of the physical world. At the heart of His plan is His Torah.

The miracle of the rebirth of Jewish sovereignty in the land of Israel, which we have been privileged to witness in our time, is a remarkable endorsement of the prescient words of Rav Yaakov Emden. Torah is flourishing once more, with the great yeshivas of Europe re-established in Israel, America and all over the world; Ponivezh, Mir and Gur are alive and thriving once again¹."

Conclusion

Every intelligent person should ask, "Why is the State of Israel not consumed?" and "Why have the Jewish People survived and thrived despite relentless and brutal oppression and attacks?" Moreover, extraordinary events should not be glossed over and go unnoticed. If one learns that hundreds of missiles were fired by Israel's enemies and little damage is done, he must respond. When hearing Prime Minister Netanyahu announce in his September 2016 address to the United Nations General Assembly that Israel is "punching two hundred times its weight in cyber", we should notice God's hand. Following the example set by Moshe Rabbeinu we must wonder, "Why does the normal course of events not happen with regard to the Jewish People?" Asking this type of question is an excellent first step in forging a deep connection with Hashem, Torah and Am Yisrael.

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¹ A beautiful short video presenting Rav Goldstein's thoughts is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0eVMfNQskWc>. Included in this video are the following thoughts: "In our lifetimes, we have witnessed some of the most remarkable miracles of Jewish history," "After the devastation of the Holocaust, a rational observer could have said, 'that is a death blow for the Jewish people. They're finished. What sort of future can there be?'"

"Yet within three years of that, Jewish sovereignty is established in the land of Israel. In 1948, on a tiny strip of land, six hundred thousand Jews joined by millions of Holocaust survivors had to ward off ferocious attacks by enemies on all sides - and did so in one military victory after another.

"With great miracles and signs and wonders... The reunification of Jerusalem, the recapture of the Temple Mount. And in the midst of all of these military dangers, absorbing millions of immigrants from all over the world... from Russia, from Ethiopia.

"Building a thriving economy... becoming leaders in technology and medicine – and all fields of human endeavor," "What a remarkable divine miracle from Hashem before our very eyes!"